DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 225 728 RC 013 768

AUTHOR Hilbert, Harvey C.
TITLE Uncommon Schools: An Innovative Approach to Rural Community Organization by County Agencies Utilizing Community Colleges.
PUB DATE Jul 81
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the National Institute on Social Work in Rural Areas (6th, Beaufort County, SC., July 26-29, 1981).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Agency Cooperation; *Agency Role; *Caseworkers; *College Role; *Cooperative Programs; County Programs; Educational Innovation; Experimental Programs; Family Day Care; Higher Education; *Internship Programs; *Rural Areas; School Community Relationship; Social Work
IDENTIFIERS South Carolina

ABSTRACT

To recapture the spirit of Thoreau's "uncommon schools," a South Carolina county Department of Social Services (DSS) sought to create a "university" of the community which would provide experiences in the field for students, feed-back to DSS workers from the community and to the local college, and would utilize the resources of the agency, the college, and the community to develop added social services. It was felt that the agency and the community would profit from development of a preparation program with the local college which would use the local agency for internships, thus preparing the students in a practical way for employment as agency caseworkers. The program consisted of three components: the agency, the college, and a series of internships in the community. The program was flexible and experimental, and the agency remained the final authority on any portion of the program. The program operated for two semesters. Although originally envisioned as a 4-year program, it was redesigned to begin in the fall of the junior year. Overall program performance was rated high, and increased understanding resulted between all the participating agencies. One result of the students' work was the development of a rural home day care center. (BRR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED225728

UNCOMMON SCHOOLS: An Innovative Approach to Rural Community Organization by County Agencies Utilizing Community Colleges

Harvey C. Hilbert, MSSA
School of Applied Social Sciences
Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, Ohio

Summer, 1981

FEB 1983
RECEIVED
ERIC/CRESS

This paper was presented at :

The Sixth National Institute on Social Work
in Rural Areas
Penn Conference Center
Beaufort County, South Carolina
July 26-29, 1981

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Harvey C. Hilbert
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

RC013768

UNCOMMON SCHOOLS: an innovative approach to rural community organization by county agencies utilizing community colleges.

"It is time that we had uncommon schools, that we did not leave off our education when we begin to be men and women. It is time that villages were universities...That is the uncommon school we want...If it is necessary, omit one bridge over the river, go around a little there, and throw one arch at least over the darker gulf of ignorance which surrounds us."1.

This paper and the projects that inspired it are attempts at recapturing the spirit of Thoreau's "uncommon schools." Our intention was to create within a county Department of Social Services a "university" of the community which would provide experiences in the field for students, feed-back to our workers from the community, the local college, and utilize the resources of the agency, the college, and the community toward the development of added services.

Community development, according to S.K.Khinduka, is a composite of "process and program objectives." As a process, Khinduka says there are four objectives, two of which are especially important to the purposes of this paper. They are:

"...to educate and motivate people for self-help.

...to initiate a self-generative, self-sustaining, and enduring process of growth."[a.]

Our "uncommon school" was conceived as an innovative outreach program by the agency's County Director. The authur developed, implemented, and supervised the program. It was felt by the Director that the agency and the community would profit from the development of a preparation program with a local college which would train through internships within our agency their students, thus preparing them, in a practical way, for em-

ployment in the agency as caseworkers.

The program, as it developed, consisted of three components, the agency, the college, and a series of internships in the community. The agency appointed an agency liason to the college, the college's Field Placement Director acted as the college's representitive to the agency, and the Sociology Faculty provided assistance in the development of the curriculum.

The agency and the college were located in the same small town, within a few blocks of one another. This facilitated easy access and increased familiarity between the two institutions. We emphasized from the beginning a high degree of flexibility with regard to access to the agency, the classroom, and policy. The program was conceived as being experimental in nature. Changes in the program's structure, requirements, and staffing allocations were expected.

THE BEGINNINGS

Once given the idea and approval of the County Director, this author developed a short one page proposal for the program. The proposal listed the initial goals, the method and scope of the program, and the potential gains for each of the components, the students, the college, and the agency. The next step was "selling" the proposal to the college and the State D.S.S. Our agency had several employees who had graduated from the college, they wre contacted and interviewed as to the workings of the college and how best to approach the administration. It was decided that contact with the Field Internship Director would be the best "in-road" to the college. An appointment was made. At the meeting it was emphasised that the agency employed several graduates, and that the agency spent a great deal of time orienting

and training new workers. The college, after enlisting the support of the Sociology faculty, approved a tentative experimental program. The next step was getting approval by the State Office. This was necessary for two reasons, one we wished to secure the support and use of the regional Staff Development & Training Coordinator and two, we wanted to secure the resources of the agency as a whole, including the agency library. The State Office approved the proposal after a Staff Development & Training review. Once all of these approvals were attained, the Sociology faculty solicited the student body for students wishing to enroll in our Social Services Preparatory Program.

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The program called for students interning each semester in a diffentDSS program area. This meant student-client contact. Each componant of the program expressed some concern over sending students into the field without preparation. The agency liason then contacted the S.D.&T. Training Coordinator. Together we decided to prepare an Orientation session, similar to the sessions new agency employees went through. A date was set for the beginning of the next semester.

Within the agency, the program supervisors were asked to prepare a list of activities student interns assigned to them could do. It was emphasised that the interns were to be treated in as much as possible, as employees of the agency. From this list developed intern "job descriptions". Between the agency staff and the college's Field Internship Director, it was decided to use the same evaluation tool that the college used for other internships in the community.

It must be emphasized that through-out the program the agency remained as the final authority on any portion of the program. It was the agency's program and we were responsible for its development, implementation, and evaluation. Occassionaly, a group of students from a class wanted to do a study that would have violated the privacy or interests of the clients the agency served. When this occurred, the agency liason went to the faculty and class to explain why the study would not be appropriate and explore other ideas for studies which could be done.

EVALUATION PHASE

The program operated for two semesters. Four internships were implemented, two in day care centers operated by the D.S.S. and two in the Children and Family Services Unit of the agency. The students, faculty, and agency workers were interviewed as to how the program was working. The mesh between classwork and field work was mentioned as a problem. The students were being taught by Sociology faculty and the application of theory to practice seemed to be less emphasized. The D.S.S. staff felt the students were too eager to get into "grass roots" work and not prepared to do it. This observation was curious since in South Carolina, the caseworkers at D.S.S. are not required to have M.S.W.'s or even B.S.W.'s for employment in direct practice.

Students and faculty expressed an interest in doing internship work in other social service agencies in the county. It was felt that the students, college, and D.S.S. would benefit from the broad range of experiences available from such internships. A major gain for the agency would be the development of a greater understanding between the county's helping agencies.

A secondary gain for the ageney would be improved interface through that understanding and inevitable contact between agencies as a result of student placement. At this point, it was discovered that the four-year nature of the experimental program was unworkable. Students entering as freshmen were not certain as to their field of study until after their sophomore year. This resulted in the loss of interns after considerable time and resources were invested. The program was then redesigned so that internships began in the fall of the Junior year.

In addition, we discovered that the Orientation sessions were not compehensive enough, that both students and agency personel felt coursework specifically targeted at agency programs, social services skills, and social problems of the client population would help greatly to increase skills and reduce the anxiety students had over "jumping-in" to direct work with clients. The agency liason worked with the Sociology faculty and developed a course to be taught by agency resource people which would serve as an introduction to public welfare work. The agency liason taught the course and coordinated other resource professionals who gave of their time in class by presenting mini-workshops. Courses in other areas were developed and taught as well, such as courses in Child Abuse and Neglect.

Over-all, we rated the performance of the program to be high and we were especially pleased by the increased understanding between all of the agencies that participated. The work accomplished by the students was of a high level. They were innovative and creative in their approach to their work. As a result of th program, services were provided which otherwise may not have been.

DEMONSTRATION: the play group project

Rural areas typically have a paucity of services directed at meeting the needs of children. Child Protective Services workers in our county often noted the need for day care, but the agency's day care resources were limited. The county operated (at the time) two day care centers which had a capacity of sixty children each. During seasonal-agricultural work, AFDC mothers were asked to work long hours in the fields. Small children were left at home. Often, the CPS were called and neglect reports were made concerning these children. Thus, the CPS was caught between, as well as the mothers, the belief that employment was a healthy, self-complimentary thing, and the consequent effects of leaving children unattended at home. It was felt that a neighborhood with a high concentration of such reports might benefit from student social services intervention. The idea for designing a play-group was presented at a Social Services class at the college. The agency liason drafted a General Outline for Services. The outline noted general responsibilities for the students, what the agency would provide, and a general idea of the purposes of such an internship.

Three students from the class contracted to do the project. The students utilized the college library, and the D.S.S. SD&T library to research the idea of play-groups and neighborhood-based daycare systems. Then they researched the county to find a target site. Three areas were tentatively selected. Along with a Children and Family Services Worker, the students made seventeen home visits interviewing neighborhood residents as to the need and desire for such a project.

From these interviews, a selection of a site was made. The students then contacted and gained the use of the Housing Authority to use a vacant apartment in the housing complex chosen. The interested parents and their children attended planning sessions with the students and the D.S.S. worker. The colleges library provided access to children's books, activity ideas, and guidelines for parent groups. As these meetings progressed, the mothers alternated child care, thus freeing the others to do their daily activities and have time away from their children, Moreover, the D.S.S. caseworker began moving away from a supervisory role and took on the role of enabler. The agency liason attended a few sessions of the operation of this play-group. During these visits the children were busilly drawing, reading, playing under the supervision of the mother on duty. The health department provided nutritional information and health information kits including bright, cheerful posters which were displayed.

After operating for two monthes, the students began gradually withdrawing from the group. They, took turns in attending and providing assistence to the parents. The student's roles underwent changes from teaching-participants to enabler, broker, and advocate. The final step was found in the latter role. The mothers decided that one of them should be "in charge". The operation had attracted considerable attention in the housing project and at times there were too many children to attend to. This was a concern of the mothers and they went about solving the problem by deciding to become a neighborhood "Family Day Care Home". The students went to the D.S.S. office and with their experience and understanding of the agency, were able to research the regulations on licensing required. The play group became, as a result, the only such home day care center in the county.

REFERENCES

1. Thoreau, H. D., Walden, in The Works of Thoreau,(Ed.)Canby, H., Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1937, p.317

2. Khinduka, S. K. "Community Development," in Kramer, R., and Specht, H., Readings in Community Organization Practice, 2nd. Edition, Prentice-Hall, 1975, p. 175